

The Sun.

BOOKS AND THE BOOK WORLD

TWELVE
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SECTION
SIX

Introducing Mr. Salteena

Made Up Out of Daisy's Nine-Year-Old Head,
He Has Already Taken London Town by Storm

THAT great ogre and sordid realist Sir James Barrie is the sponsor of Daisy Ashford in her American debut. *The Young Visitors* was described by Mr. Walpole in these pages two weeks ago. Every one who read his London letter must have wanted to read the novel, and will now have opportunity, provided Mr. Sumner keeps hands off. All London is reading it. Mr. Walpole says so, and we learn from a man who knows that the sale there is running to 1,000 copies a day.

Somewhat as has been said of Walt Whitman, Miss Daisy's literary morality is rather *un* than *in*. Our reason for apprehending a vigilant move by Mr. Sumner will be apparent from the following extracts. The heroine, Ethel Monticue, is house guest of the sub-hero, Bernard Clark:

"Suddenly Bernard lit his pipe. I was thinking he said passionately what about going up to London for a weeks Gaierty.

"Who inquired Ethel in a low tone.

"You and me said Bernard. I know of several splendid hotels and we could go to theatres and parties and enjoy ourselves to the full.

"So we could what an idear cried Ethel."

II.

They arrive in London at the Gaierty Hotel. "They went upstairs and entered number 9 a very fine compartment with a large downy bed and white doors with glass handles leading into number 10 an equally dainty room but a trifle smaller.

"Which will you have Ethel asked Bernard.

"Oh well I would rather you settled it said Ethel. I am willing to abide by your choice.

"The best shall be yours then said Bernard bowing gallantly and pointing to the biggest room. Ethel blushed at his speaking look. I shall be quite lost in that huge bed she added to hide her embarrassment.

"Yes I expect you will said Bernard and now what about a little table d'ôte followed by a theater."

Miss Daisy Ashford is grown up now, but when she wrote her novel she was 9. She wrote it, Barrie tells, "in a stout little notebook (twopence), and there it has lain for years . . . in lavender, as it were, waiting for a publisher to ride that way and rescue it." But this is a slighting treatment of the romance of its success—just the shabby treatment you would expect from a snorting anti-sentimentalist.



This Was Daisy.

Why, *The Young Visitors'* belated conquest of London is a veritable peter-pannikin of the conquest by *Jane Eyre*! Like another "Curren Bell," Daisy wrote in the obscurity of a modest country home. Then she forgot her MS. and grew up—and here it is, the sensation of the hour, undoubtedly pouring royalties upon her!

Commentators will say (they'll say anything) that its London triumph is due to its value as a relief after the war. We don't consider that explanation adequate. We think it would have been snatched at in the ninetieth year of a century of deep peace.

III.

The hero is Mr. Salteena, "an elderly man of 42 . . . not quite a gentleman, but you would never notice it, but it can't be helped, anyhow," as he says; however, he seeks help for it, going up to town with a letter to the Earl of Clincham, who lives in "compartments" in the "Crystale Palace," and will put social polish upon not-quite gentlemen and smuggle them into high life, provided they have "plenty in the bank and 10 pounds in ready gold." Little pitchers had big ears in the Ashford household—big eyes, too, as Barrie notes; Ethel will "put some red rouge on my face because I am very pale owing to the drains in this house.

"You will look very silly said Mr. Salteena with a superier laugh.

"Well so will you said Ethel in a snappy tone and she ran out of the room with a very superier run throwing out her legs behind and her arms swinging in rithum."

We hardly know where to start quoting or where to stop. Mr. Salteena and Ethel go to visit Bernard Clark:

"Mr. Salteena woke up rather early and was surprised and delighted to find Horace the footman entering with a cup of tea.

"Oh thank you my man said Mr. Salteena rolling over in the costly bed. . . . Ethel are you getting up shouted Mr. Salteena. Very nearly replied Ethel faintly from the nest room.

"I say said Mr. Salteena excitedly I have had some tea in bed."

IV.

In London the Earl has taken his protege to a "levie," presenting him as Lord Hyssops because it sounds better:

"Mr. Salteena bowed so low he nearly fell off the platform, and as the prince put out a hand Mr. Salteena thought he had better kiss it. . . . Then the Earl chipped in and how is the dear Queen he said reverently.

"Not up to much said his Highness she feels the heat poor soul and he waved to a placard which said in large letters The Queen is indisposed."

The most wonderful chapter is nat-

urally the great love scene. We don't mean to quote a word of it; you are expected to read this book! Over the introduction we cannot contain our righteous anger. That brute of a Barrie takes abominable liberties on the strength of the heroine's likeness at 9. "There is a complacency about it," he writes, "that by the severe might perhaps be called smugness. It needed no effort for that face to knock off a masterpiece. When she was actually at work I think the expression was more solemn, with the tongue firmly clenched between the teeth." And he imagines the tongue put farther and farther out as the story was advanced, and slowly pulled in at the rapturous moment of completion. This is no knightly fashion of escorting a young lady.

V.

Any child's private and secret effort in authorship is unconsciously dear and funny, like Emmy Lou, but in spots. Daisy's production, beside being "remarkable even in its length and completeness," is richly dear and funny on every page. We do not wonder at the prudence of the American publisher, who requests reviewers to limit their quoting.

This genuine article puts to shame the best humorists' imitation of juvenile writing. It beats the sanguinary adventures of Harold Ramorez, attributed to Penrod, and probably an edited "document." Chaperon, as Barrie observes, seems to be the one good word Daisy had never heard of; and the several instantaneously fruitful honeymoons she ends with are ever so much funnier in that way than Eugene Field's *Primer* fable of the little girl growing up all alone on an island and having seven babies. Some one wrote a fairy tale series a la Daisy for *Punch* a while ago: it was clever, but Daisy leaves it insipid.

Here and there is a touch which would suggest adult assistance, did not Barrie vow that the manuscript was accurately reproduced without change. When his word is given, we for one decline to try to go back of the returns; and as for two hundred other touches, the choicest blossoms in the Daisy chain, no mature contrivance could have produced them. What concerns us now is a fear that once the book has got going in this country seventeen publishers will hire seventeen writers to emulate it, or else dig up every child's manuscript in the land, expecting to make money off a second Daisy. It can't be done, and our publishing friends are hereby warned not to try.

One aspect of Daisy's conquest is especially gratifying. Lo, a sterling new departure in the shape of an English first novel whose hitherto unknown author is not suspected of being Mr. Wells!

THE YOUNG VISITERS, OR, MR. SALTEENA'S PLAN. BY DAISY ASHFORD. George H. Doran Company.